DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 642 EA 022 221

AUTHOR Easton, John Q.; And Others
TITLE Securing Participation of Schools for an In-Depth Observational Study.
INSTITUTION Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, IL.
PUB DATE Jul 90
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Effective Schools Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Observation; Pilot Projects; Program Evaluation; Sampling; *School Based Management; *School Involvement; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS *Chicago Public Schools IL

ABSTRACT

The first phase of a monitoring project to evaluate the implementation of the Chicago Reform Act, with a focus on the process of securing school participation in the study, is described in this report. Twelve schools out of a random stratified sample of 16 schools agreed to participate in the study, which was to consist of interviews and classroom observation. The high degree of time and involvement required in the school recruiting stage was found to be consistent with the gradual nature of restructuring efforts. The principal was identified as crucial in securing local council approval. Awareness of the influential roles played by principals, local school council chairs, and teachers; council member characteristics; and the decision-making styles of different councils is suggested for improving the recruitment process. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED323642

MONITORING AND RESEARCHING THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL REFORM IN CHICAGO

SECURING PARTICIPATION OF SCHOOLS FOR AN IN-DEPTH OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John Q. Easton
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

John Q. Easton
Director of Monitoring and Research

Cheryl Johnson
Coordinator of Monitoring

Jesse Qualls
Research Analyst

Darryl Ford
Research Assistant

EA 022 221

July 1990

CHICAGO PANEL ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE
220 South State Street, Suite 1212 Chicago, Illinois 60604 (312) 939-2202

CHICAGO PANEL ON
PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE

Harold W. Smith, President
James Lucien & Arturo Jauregui, Vice Presidents
Lauren E. Allen, Treasurer; Carolyn Cordes, Secretary
Tee Gallay, Honorary President; G. Alfred Hess, Jr., Executive Director

The Chicago Panel is a coalition of the following member organizations

American Jewish Committee
Aspira Inc., of Illinois
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicago Region PTA
Chicago United
Chicago Urban League
Chicago Westside Branch N.A.A.C.P.
Citizens Schools Committee
Community Renewal Society
Erie Neighborhood House
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Junior League of Chicago, Inc.
Latino Institute
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Women Voters of Chicago
Metropolitan Mission Strategy Organization of the United Methodist Church (Metro)
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
United Neighborhood Organization of Chicago
The Woodlawn Organization
Youth Guidance

Monitoring and Research Project Staff

John Q. Easton, Director of Monitoring and Research
Cheryl Johnson, Coordinator of Monitoring
Jesse Qualls, Research Analyst
Sandra Storey, Research Analyst
Paul Dean and Darryl Ford, Research Assistants

Major Funding for the Monitoring and Research Project is provided by

The Chicago Community Trust
The Field Foundation of Illinois
The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
The Spencer Foundation
The Woods Charitable Fund

MONITORING AND RESEARCHING

THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL

REFORM IN CHICAGO

SECURING PARTICIPATION OF SCHOOLS FOR AN IN-DEPTH OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

July 1990

John Easton, Cheryl Johnson, and Jesse Qualls made the preparation, contacts and requests to schools to participate in an in-depth study as described in this paper. Darryl Ford used their field notes and a brief overview prepared earlier to write this report.

Monitoring Project Overview
And Introduction

The Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance is embarking on an ambitious five year project to monitor and conduct research on the implementation of the Chicago School Reform Act. The initial focus of the monitoring project is on the composition and operation of the Local School Councils (LSCs), the development of school based management (SBM) and increased local governance, expansion of leadership roles in the schools, and the development of the school improvement plans. During subsequent years of this study, the emphasis will shift from governance to implementation issues, including the implementation of any new instructional practices. During the final years of the project, the emphasis will be on documenting improvements in the schools. This paper reports on the first phase of the monitoring project. In particular, it describes the process of inviting schools to participate in this study and suggests what we may attend to closely as we conduct our research.

Our plan for Monitoring School Reform in Chicago calls for intensive study of sixteen schools. Using a random sample stratified by race and region, we identified 48 schools as possible participants--three sets of sixteen schools meeting the sampling requirements. We first approached schools by phone and set up appointments to meet with the principal. Two Panel staff members met with the principal (and in many instances, the LSC chairperson) to discuss our study. One staff member subsequently remained in contact with each school, attempting to secure its participation.

Specifically, we explained that in order to conduct this monitoring and research project, we wanted to conduct interviews with the principal, selected teachers, staff, parents, and students; and observe all Local School Council meetings, and some faculty meetings, Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) meetings, and other school events. Given the extensive nature of our monitoring plan, LSC members had much to consider when deciding whether to participate.

By March of 1990, after discussing this study with eighteen schools, a total of twelve schools had formally agreed to participate. At that time we decided to concentrate our efforts on studying these twelve instead of continuing to spend time on securing the participation of additional schools. (We are also attending the LSC meetings at one other elementary school that we have yet to ask to participate. We will ask this school and three others to participate in September of 1990 when we increase our sample to 16 schools.) The twelve schools that agreed to participate include eight elementary and four high schools. Three other schools officially voted not to participate and three remain undecided. Although the process of securing schools' participation proved more difficult than anticipated, much can be learned from it especially when the process is considered in light of the literature on school based management. Consequently, we will make references to this body of work as information on our securing participation is presented.

Findings

Literature on school based management emphasizes that this form of governance is a process which takes time to implement successfully (David 1989), and cautions that districts adopting this form of governance cannot expect to make major improvements in a short period of time. Consistent with this, we found the process of requesting schools to cooperate took more time, effort, and a higher degree of involvement than we had anticipated. Most schools required two to three months to decide whether or not they wanted to be included in the study, and for many of the LSCs, this was their first major, and sometimes controversial, decision.

We generally found that parent and community LSC members were more apt to want to participate in our study than were principals and teachers. Even with the general support of parents and community members, securing a school's participation was often a long process. On average, we visited each school four to six times between December 1989 and March 1990. A typical sequence of the process involved in securing a school's participation follows:

> -December 5, 1989. John Easton (JE) and Jesse Qualls (JQ) met with the principal of School A to explain our study and request permission to make a presentation to the LSC. The principal was receptive, partly because of a positive reaction to a previous Panel study, and endorsed the idea of a presentation to the council.
>
> -January 10, 1990. JQ presented our request to the LSC. He explained the study verbally and distributed written material about it and the Panel's other monitoring projects. Although the LSC seemed prepared to vote in favor of participating in the study at this meeting, they decided to table the request until the PPAC had been informed of and voted on the study. They took this action after one of the teacher members of the LSC raised several questions.
>
> -January 17, 1990. JE and JQ attended a PPAC meeting that included the entire faculty. JE presented the study to a wary group concerned about possible intrusions from outsiders. After the meeting, a teacher leader discussed the negative reactions and suggested that we attend a second PPAC meeting.
>
> -February 2, 1990. JQ returned to the PPAC. After the PPAC vented a great deal of frustration with school reform (primarily related to the low representation of teachers on the LSC), it voted to support the Panel's proposal.
>
> -February 7, 1990. The Local School Council unanimously voted to participate in our study.

Although this represents a typical sequence, we also encountered the extremes. In one school, we met with the principal in the morning and secured council agreement to participate that evening. In another school, we made seven visits and presentations before finally gaining approval.

The above sequence is also helpful because it identifies issues which seemed to be of key importance in our securing participation of schools. For example, the principal in the above sequence greeted us favorably and endorsed the idea of us making a formal

presentation to the Local School Council. Generally, where the principal was supportive of his/her school participating in the study, we secured formal consent from the council. Specifically, in seven out of the twelve schools which agreed to participate, the principals expressed interest in our work and were willing to be included. In one school, the principal stated that she felt comfortable with our presentation, that she preferred to present our information to the council herself, and that she was confident that she could persuade the LSC to participate. Similarly, the principal in another school readily agreed to have the school participate in our study, stating, "The LSC is meeting tonight. I'll explain the study and they [LSC members] will approve it." The Local School Council unanimously voted to participate.

By contrast, the schools in which principals did not express an interest were less likely to participate. In one school, the LSC and its chair seemed receptive to participating in the study; however, because the principal was hesitant, the council voted against participation. The LSC chair explained, "I think the school should participate in the study, but the principal does not want to because she has a policy that does not allow classroom observations." Continuing, the chair stated, "I don't agree with the principal's closed classroom policy, but she has a lot of other good programs at the school." In only one school did we find a council who voted to participate even though the principal was reluctant about the study.

This finding--that schools with principals supportive of our study were more likely to participate while those with principals who were not supportive were less likely to participate--is also consistent with literature on school based management. In order for school based management to be implemented successfully, this form of governance must have sources of advocacy, especially from the principal's office. Lindquest and Mauriel (1989) show the importance of the principal in their study of school based management. In one school district that they studied, they found that it was the principal who decided whether or not the site council would play an advisory or decision making role in the school. Similarly, in a study of site-based governance in Salt Lake City, Utah, Malen and Ogawa (1988) have shown that the principal wields considerable power in decision making. When site councils needed to make decisions, it was most often the professionals (the principals and teachers) and not the parents and community members who decided. (This may be the result of the selection process for Salt Lake's parent members on the councils. These members were often selected to serve by principals and other leaders from within the schools; this may have contributed to their assuming an advisory role.) Furthermore, when the professionals needed to make a decision, it was most often the principal who decided and not the teachers; interestingly, teachers only made decisions when they were *dumped* on them by the principal. Principals in Salt Lake City were able to influence decisions. This is consistent with our finding that it was easier to gain participation of schools where the principal was supportive of our work and exerted his/her influence on the LSC.

The above sequence of securing participation is also helpful because it identifies one of the concerns most often expressed by principals and LSCs about participating in our work: concerns over classroom observations. Many experts have suggested that the Chicago School Reform Act must have an impact on classroom practices if the achievement related goals are to be met. Because of this, the Panel will look at the effects of school reform on classroom instruction as part of our observational study. In particular, we are interested in questions like "How does school reform affect classroom instruction?" and "How do new teaching techniques influence student achievement and attitude?" In order to address these

types of questions, we intend to observe teachers and students in their classrooms. As stated, this intent posed some problems.

Principals and teachers expressed their concerns over the classroom observational component of our study in several ways and indicated that they felt classroom observations would be intrusive. Principals and teachers were concerned about the monitoring project interfering with the real mission of schools: the teaching of children. As mentioned above, one principal enforced a closed classroom policy; in another school, twenty of the thirty faculty members initially voted against participating in the study because they felt that it would disrupt school activities; in still another school, several teachers expressed concern over the Panel entering to observe them in their classes. (It was later reported to us that the faculty of this last school voted twenty to twelve against participating because of its concern over being observed.)

Principals and LSC members expressed many other concerns. Council members in several schools wanted to know how their particular school would benefit from participating in the Monitoring Project. One of these schools specifically asked, "Would the Chicago Panel help in developing programs for the school?" Council members at another school questioned what type of assistance the Panel would provide in return for their participation. In yet another school, the LSC chair asked if the Panel could provide any training for the council and whether or not the students could participate in the study in any way. Although our pat response to those asking what they might get in return was only that we could offer technical assistance in evaluating the school's program, no schools seemed to be against participating solely because we could offer little in return.

LSC members and principals were also wary about additional paperwork which might result if their school participated. Others were initially disturbed over the Monitoring Project lasting for five years (this concern was alleviated after we explained that we would only seek a one year commitment that would be subject to renewal each subsequent year by both the school and the Panel). Still in another school, the principal reported to us that the LSC had decided not to participate because it was "suspicious" of outside organizations. (We later learned that this school's LSC had not actually made a decision about participating and that the principal just reported to us that the school would not participate.) Finally, faculty members in one school expressed concerns over our finding and reporting information that did not seem to be directly related to school reform issues. As the principal explained: "Teachers are concerned whether or not reports would include other findings that were not included in the initial study." With the exception of the "suspicious" school, these concerns were expressed more as passing comments than as real stumbling blocks; however, they were real to some LSC members and principals.

In addition to the concerns over participating expressed by LSC members and teachers, other interesting findings related to school reform emerged during our attempts to secure participation. For example, in one school which voted against participating, teachers were vehemently against participating in our project. This became apparent during one of our formal presentations at that school when a teacher began to complain that teachers had been "shut out" of the school reform process. This teacher asked the presenter, John Easton, what the Panel would do if the teachers were opposed to the study but the council voted to participate. When John stated that the Panel would go ahead with the study, the teacher became angry and stated that this was proof that no one respected teachers.

Similarly, teachers in another school expressed their dissatisfaction with school reform. At this school, we made a formal presentation to an unenthusiastic faculty during a PPAC meeting. At the invitation of a teacher representative on the LSC, we made a second presentation to the school's PPAC. During this presentation, the members of the PPAC vented their frustrations over school reform. They explained their sense of powerlessness because of their opinion that teachers are under-represented on the Local School Council. Furthermore, they did not like the council being composed of people who in their view were least equipped to make crucial decisions. Ironically, after venting these frustrations, PPAC members voted overwhelmingly to support our study. Interestingly, the Local School Council in this school was initially supportive of our study, but would not vote to participate until after the PPAC had been informed of and voted on the study. After the PPAC voted to support the study, the LSC voted unanimously to participate. This indicates that in this school, the opinion of the "professionals"--the PPAC--carried weight, and that the parent and community representatives on the council respected the opinion of the faculty.

Another finding occurred in a school which voted to participate in the study even though the faculty did not seem eager. In an initial LSC vote, four members favored participating, four abstained from voting, and one member voted against participating. The one vote against was cast by a teacher member of the LSC who stated that he had to vote according to his constituents, the majority of whom were against participating for all the familiar reasons. This identifies an issue that recurs in all governing bodies--whether or not elected representatives are obliged to vote as their constituents would want or to vote their conscience. This matter may in fact not be resolved for Local School Councils.

Still another interesting finding from our attempts to secure participation comes from a principal who believes that school reform has actually reduced parental participation in her school--contrary to a primary intent of reform and school based management. This principal explained that she favored the concept of school reform, but that the development of Local School Councils has reduced the amount of parental involvement with the school because many of the parents who were previously active in school programs were not eligible to run for council positions due to the fact that they were employed part-time by the Board of Education. Consequently, those who were most active in the life of the school could not run for LSC positions without giving up their part-time jobs and no new opportunities were created for them to participate.

Furthermore, this same principal thought that parents would not be able to fully participate in school reform because of the needed amount of time that completing school improvement plans would require. She stated that time constraints would hinder parental participation. This principal's concerns are consistent with the literature on school based management which acknowledges that this form of governance does requires a great time investment.

We also learned that Local School Councils have been required to make many decisions in a short amount of time. Such demands on councils have resulted in confusion at times. For example, in one school Cheryl Johnson expected the council to make a decision about participating in our project, but our study was not an agenda item and was not discussed during the meeting. After the meeting, Johnson asked the LSC secretary whether the council decided to participate; she responded that a special meeting would have to be called to make that decision. Johnson then asked the principal about the school making a decision. The principal responded that the school had already voted to be a part

of our study and that a letter stating this had just been mailed to the Panel. The secretary then apologized to Johnson and said she just did not remember the decision having been made. Similarly, the Local School Council chairperson added: "There are so many things going on, I forgot too."

One final point is worth mentioning. An LSC chair at one of the schools which eventually decided not to participate reacted strongly after noticing the names of one of our member organizations. (The Chicago Panel is a coalition of twenty civic groups.) She and the school principal explained that they had past dealings with this member organization and did not like its tactics. It soon became evident to John Easton, the Panel's presenter, that this LSC chair would not support our study.

The process of securing schools' participation for our In-Depth Observational Study has been useful in identifying issues which we may want to attend to closely as we conduct our research. As illustrated, key actors on the councils (the principal, the LSC chair, and teachers, for example) play influential roles; we may wish to monitor these people and their contributions carefully. Further, we will need to watch the development of the roles of the parent and community members on the council. We may also want to pay careful attention to the teacher members on the council given their feelings of powerlessness and under-representation. Finally, we might note whether some councils are able to make decisions in a more efficient manner than others and try to identify why this is the case. Of course, there is a myriad of things to be cognizant of as we conduct our research; however, the process of securing schools' participation has provided us with some clues about what is going on in the early stages of Chicago School Reform and what we might look for as our research proceeds.

References

David, Jane. "Highlights of Research on School Based Management." *Educational Leadership* May (1989): 50.

Lindquest, Karin M., and Mauriel, John J. "School-Based Management-Doomed to Failure?" *Education and Urban Society* 21.4 (1989): 403 -416.

Malen, Betty and Ogawa, Rodney T. "Professional-Patron Influence on Site-Based Governance Councils: A Confounding Case Study." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 10.4 (1988): 251 - 270.

CHICAGO PANEL ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY AND FINANCE
METROSTAT - Center for Metropolitan Statistics and Research
220 South State Street, Suite 1212 - Chicago, Illinois 60604 - (312) 939-2202

CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM - RESEARCH AND MONITORING PROJECT

June 1989 Grade Retention in Chicago Public Elementary Schools. May 1990.
Teacher Attitudes Toward School Reform. October 1989.
Observing Local School Council Elections. October 1989.

STATE SCHOOL REFORM

Implementing Educational Reform in Illinois. November 1985.
What Are We Willing to Pay for School Reform? May 1985.

DESEGREGATION AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS

The Changing Racial Enrollment Patterns in Chicago's Schools. April 1990
Who Benefits From Desegregation? December 1987.
Who Gets Extra Staff? May 1986.
Recreational Programs in a Time of Fiscal Constraint. January 1985.

DROPOUTS

Against the Odds: The Early Identification of Dropouts. June 1989.
Invisibly Pregnant: Teenage Mothers and the Chicago Public Schools. December 1988.
Bending the Twig: The Elementary Years and Dropout Rates in the Chicago Public Schools. July 1987.
Where's Room 185? How Schools Can Reduce Their Dropout Problem. December 1986.
Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools. April 1985.

TEACHER MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Teacher Transfers and Classroom Disruption. January 1984.
Class Coverage in the Chicago Public Schools. June 1983.

BUDGET

1987-1988 Assessment of School Site Budgeting Practices of the Chicago Public Schools. August 1988.
1986-1987 Assessment of School Site Budgeting Practice of the Chicago Public Schools. June 1987.
School Budget Hearing Assessment. June 1986.
Revenue Short Falls at the Chicago Board of Education: 1970-1984. June 1984 (updated annually).
Budget Cuts at the Board of Education. July 1982 (updated annually).

RESOURCE VOLUMES

Chicago Public Schools DataBook, School Year 1988-1989. February 1990.
Directory of Youth Services. December 1989.
1988 METROSTAT DataBook. November 1989.

OTHER

Chicago School Reform: What It Is and How It Came To Be. March 1990.
Assessment of Sara Lee Corporation's Adopt-A-School Program at Harper High School 1982 - 1988. August 1988.
Chicagoans View Their Public Schools. June 1985.

*For descriptions and costs of the above publications, please request a publication list from the Chicago Panel, (312) 939-2202.